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ABSTRACT

This document explains how adult and community educators in the United Kingdom can involve adults as equal partners in the provision and delivery of adult learning. The guide profiles many innovative and imaginative ways in which adult and community learning practitioners are engaging with their communities in increasing the demand for adult learning; shaping policy about local provision for adults; and planning, providing, and evaluating learning. The following are among the topics discussed in Sections 1 through 15: the new emphasis on learners and learning; listening to learners and public policies; getting the basics right; working in partnership; using experts; the design and planning stage; the research and consultation stage; resources and costs; and building in sustainability. The following are among the 19 pointers listed in Section 16: (1) be ambitious and willing to take risks because most traditional consultation methods have failed to attract new adult learners; (2) decide from the outset the extent to which you can contribute to consultation outcomes; (3) identify the different people that need to be involved; (4) ensure the "buy-in" of decision makers; (5) seek good practice from other local communities; and (6) ensure that participants are welcomed, valued, heard, and clear about how their contributions will be used. A glossary and lists of eight suggestions for further reading and nine World Wide Web sites are included. (MN)

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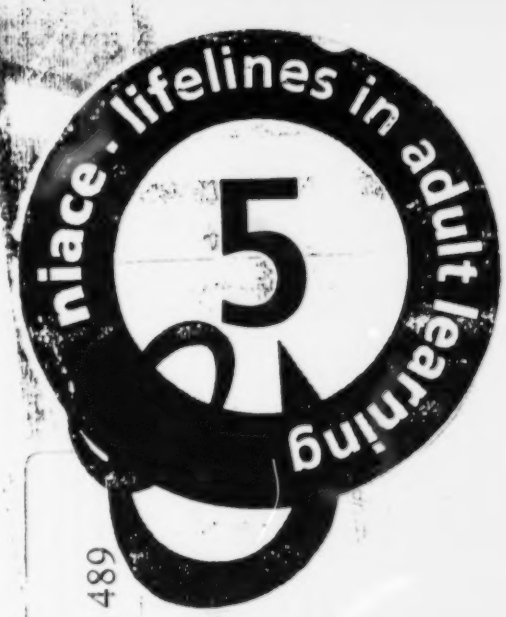

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Consulting adults

Chris Jude

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Consulting adults

Chris Jude

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Contents

1	Consulting adults	1
2	A new emphassis on learners and learning	4
3	In groups and out groups	8
4	Why it matters	11
5	Listening to learners and public policies	14
6	Understanding the concepts	16
7	Getting started and how to go about it	18
8	Getting the basics right	20
9	Working in partnership	22
10	The use of experts	25
11	The design and planning stage	28
12	The research and consultation stage	29
13	Resources and costs	31
14	Building in sustainability	32
15	Postscript	35
16	Check it out	36
	Glossary	38
	Further reading and resources	44
	Useful websites	45

Note to the reader

Inspirations: refer to case studies and examples of good practice.

Glossary: the meanings of the words underlined in the text can be found in the glossary on page 38.

ADRIAN PROBERT

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Consulting adults

This guide is about involving adults as equal partners in the provision and delivery of adult learning. It is also about finding out what adults want to learn and what motivates them to take up learning both for themselves and wider social fulfilment.

The title *Consulting Adults* is deliberately ambiguous. Its vision includes the more familiar ways that adult and community learning practitioners consult *with* learners, through outreach, forums, focus groups, learner evaluations, questionnaires and the like. But it also pays tribute to the range of innovative and imaginative ways that adult and community learning practitioners are increasingly trying to engage communities – local people as experts, researchers, learning champions – in planning, providing and evaluating adult and community learning provision.

Consulting adults are also those local people who get involved in consultancy and consultation. They are in the driving seat when it comes to involving others in their communities in discussions about learning and in developing their motivation to learn. They are local people willing to contribute their knowledge and expertise to citizen panels, conferences and local planning events in order to explore what they and their neighbours want to learn in ways that can make it happen.

Consulting adults in this way involves bottom-up planning approaches. Approaches which can be used by local providers to inform their adult learning plans. Approaches which can be used to develop Surestart, Neighbourhood Renewal and other regeneration strategies, whereby local providers and local people recognise the need to work more closely together to address the issues and challenges that affect them.

Businesses, charities and voluntary organisations are adopting similar approaches. The Cooperative Bank involves customers in deciding its ethical investment policy. The Alzheimers Society involves people affected by Alzheimers in deciding what the charity's research priorities should be. Consulting adults in all of these ways evoke time-honoured, community-led approaches to learning. Importantly for adult and community learning, they are helping us re-discover some very basic truths about people, learning and democracy.

Roots and reasons

Adult and community learning derives from a proud tradition of learners stating clearly what they do and do not want to learn.

The impetus behind the great learning communities of the 19th century came

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from a community-led and socially inspired belief in the power of learning to transform the lives of individuals, their children and their social class.

In the 19th century, the mutual improvement societies, libraries, correspondence courses and workers' institutes, through which this extraordinary flowering of learning first found expression, came about through people acting together, invariably in situations of poverty, sometimes at personal risk. Driven by a hunger to learn, their use of the word 'mutual' embraced the social and economic as well as the individual benefits of learning. Their experience confirmed that when people are engaged in defining what and how they want to learn, they will be more motivated, determined and likely to achieve.

Then and now

This passion for learning, which can change and enrich lives, is echoed through and across communities and time. Many of the most profound and moving political and social transformations of our time began with groups of people exploring together what they needed to learn in order to bring about social and political changes. Trades union education, community education, the Peace Movement and the Women's Movement have all had strong links with radical adult education over the years. Always associated with personal experience, such learning has also been about working with others to make a difference in the wider community and in political and civil society.

Learning for social change

This is why the links between active citizenship, democratic participation and access to and participation in learning remain so important today. Learning can be about discovering who we are, what matters to us and how to say it. The American basic skills strategy, *Equipped for the Future*, has as its four purposes: access, voice, independent action and bridges to the future. It pledges to develop the skills adults need to have a greater impact as parents/family members, citizens/community members and workers. 'Voice' means 'to be able to express ideas and opinions with the confidence they will be heard and taken into account'. 'Bridges to the Future' means 'to learn how to learn so adults can keep up with the world as it changes'.

Past and present

We could argue that the beliefs and ideas that galvanised past learners and the structures through which their ideas and beliefs found meaning, such as trades unions, churches, campaigning organisations and clubs of various kinds, no longer provide the communities of meaning and activism they once did. The all-embracing structures and meaning through which people assert and discover meaning are now simply more difficult to locate.

But in fact community-based and neighbourhood groups, local and national networks do exist and people continue to create them. People still form groups motivated by shared beliefs and enthusiasms. Book groups, gardening clubs and environmental groups are examples. People discover meaning and belonging through sports activities, their children and families, their history and shared experience.

Some of the most imaginative and participative approaches to community-led research and planning are developed by people, who see learning as a tool for neighbourhood regeneration and renewal, where neighbourhood regeneration and adult and community learning can work side by side. Change, whether externally or locally generated – for example, the decision to re-build the local estate, to close a local school, to tackle local drugs issues and crime – is still a powerful catalyst for learning. Not only the learning that addresses people's most apparent needs but the learning that fulfils their longer-term visions and aspirations.

Learning is always at some level about people naming, understanding and seeking 'really useful solutions' for the issues that affect them. Such solutions may involve academic and vocational learning. They will almost certainly involve the broader personal, social and cultural learning that turns idea into action and belief into practice and behaviour. Bottom-up approaches to learning do not usually express themselves first as courses and qualifications. The demand that comes from people talking through and exploring what they want to learn has its roots in far more complex motivations, including the powerful, and often contradictory, emotions and feelings evoked by past learning experiences.

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2 A new emphasis on learners and learning

Experienced adult and community learning practitioners like to start with learners and learning rather than courses and qualifications. Learners and learning are increasingly the focus of post-16 education policy.

Research

Research tells us that the power of learning is undeniable:

- participation in learning strengthens communities and makes for less divisive societies;
- learning can help tackle discrimination and social exclusion;
- the better qualified we are, the more we are likely to earn, our health prospects improve and we are more likely to enjoy a greater sense of well-being;
- policy initiatives emphasise the contribution of learning to success in the modern economy.

At all levels of society, participation in learning through life has becomes a major policy priority and is closely related to progressive social change. These are the arguments in favour of learning. However, they only become a reality when people who have the most to gain from learning decide to get involved.

Participation

We know a lot about who participates in learning and who does not:

- about a third of adults do not take part in formal education or training after leaving school;
- these adults have few or no qualifications;
- they are likely to live in absolute or relative poverty, to be from working-class families and some ethnic minority groups;
- they include high numbers of men, especially older, unemployed men and manual workers;
- in common with women, [these] men are likely to share the view that, education is 'for other people' (McGivney (1990).

Recent NIACE participations surveys confirm that, among the poorest and most

disadvantaged people in our society, participation rates remain unchanged.

Those who have most continue to consume the most education resources. As Helena Kennedy's *Learning Works* report summarises, "If at first you don't succeed, you don't succeed."

Blaming the victim

Yet when it comes to referring to people who, for reasons of their own, reject post-school learning, the language we use is negative and frequently implies blame. It is often more comfortable to cast people as victims or as being in need of enlightenment, than to grapple with the complex social, economic, cultural and personal factors that make formal learning an option let alone a choice.

The motivation to survive day by day can make the gaining of basic skills seem comparatively inappropriate. Approaches that regard people as deficient or lacking miss the point. No-one is inspired or motivated to learn by being reminded of what they lack or their needs or by being told that they 'ought to'.

- Use of language that implies blame include 'non-participants', 'disaffected' and 'hard to reach';
- More positive, 'outreach', 'inclusion', 'access' and neighbourhood renewal agendas, still adopt the perspective of policy makers, providers and benefactors;
- Our use of language and behaviour can be a barrier to the mutual learning and equity on which strong professional and community relationships are based.

How is language used in your organisation? Imagine how you would feel if you were referred to in the ways that some professionals habitually refer to their clients.

Understanding people's past learning experiences

People develop complex ways of handling the failure and humiliation that for many are associated with their past education. Yet these strategies for dealing with the

> **"We need a new professional lexicon for adult learning, a lexicon in which desire, motivation, respect and confidence are the new key terms."**
> Professor Bob Fryer

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past are not always negative. People tend to reject experiences that reject and humiliate them, creating new identities for themselves that recover success and self-worth. To reject past learning experiences can be a moral as well as a political statement. It is not necessarily a personal failing to reject what seems like more of the same. Some people's purpose and pleasure in learning are best fulfilled by themselves or informally through learning with others. Others do not see formal learning as relevant or necessary to fulfil their life purposes but learn as and when they need to.

For others, memories of past learning experiences can be painful. Embarrassment, humiliation and shame are the feelings they often keep to themselves and may cause them to withdraw and feel isolated. Once trust and confidence have been created, people who return to learning often confide such feelings in sympathetic professionals.

- Learning happens best where respect, trust, and challenge are developed between practitioner and learner. People know when they are being patronised. Making negative assumptions about others suppresses their potential.
- Practitioners need to be aware that, for many adult learners, new learning aspirations and desires co-exist with feelings of fear, anger and low self-esteem.
- If learners and practitioners alike are to achieve their full potential, challenge, risk and the continual re-shaping of initial learning aims must be at the heart of the learning relationship.
- The experience of people who believe they are not good enough or not very clever is to want to give up. Valuing and respecting someone else must include challenging their hurtful self-perceptions and enabling them to excel.
- Developing relationships that enable people to express and navigate their feelings about learning is as important as the achievement of their expressed learning goals.

The values held by organisations are fundamental to the ways in which practitioners comprehend and fulfil their roles. Reflect upon your organisation's values and mission. How are these made evident in the relationships between the organisation and its local communities and between practitioners and learners?

Motivation

One of the biggest challenges that face us as adult and community learning practitioners is understanding what motivates people to learn. The emphasis often is on the barriers to learning rather than on the ways in which people transcend them. Attention has focused mainly on the supply side of learning. Now policy makers and providers are focusing on the demand for learning – what motivates people to learn and what they want to learn.

> Learning is usually treated as a supply-side matter, thought to follow teaching, training or information delivery. But learning is much more demand driven. People learn in response to need. When people cannot see the need for what's being taught, they ignore it, reject it, or fail to assimilate it in any meaningful way. Conversely, when they have a need, then if the resources for learning are available, people learn effectively and quickly.
> 'Learning in theory and practice' in *The Social Life of Information*.

The shopping centre, school playground, football stadium, mosque, church and ICT network each offer new opportunities for practitioners to engage with people in the places where they meet, to discover purpose and identity. However, venues themselves will not reveal motivation, nor is the motivation for religious or sports activities always easily translated into learning. Discovering what we want and need to learn is not a one-off discussion or conversation. It is a process of discovery. Approaches that support, while continuing to explore and refine people's aspirations, often produce more sustainable results.

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3 In groups and out groups

Many policy initiatives that are concerned with listening to learners or widening participation, consult with or focus on already existing organised groups. We are often too easily satisfied with notions of representation that are little more than tokenism and that substitute for less managed and therefore more democratic forms of dialogue. Learning forums are usually made up of existing learners or rely on the involvement of group representatives. Better approaches to consultation involve a broader range of people in more open-ended and exploratory forms of dialogue. Such approaches involve them on more equal terms and engage their expertise.

Social exclusion is about being outside the groupings or networks where experiences can be shared, let alone represented. To be socially excluded can mean being unconnected, not belonging or even wanting to be.

People have many different ways of belonging that include being part of groups. Often more informal than formal, these are not always the groups that policy-makers mean when they refer to voluntary or even community groups. Groups are an important way of conceptualising and analysing people's experiences and are fundamental to the planning, quality and funding of provision. The creation of new cultures of activism and collectivism and the formation of new groupings are fundamental to achieving a more democratic and participative learning society.

The best approaches to consulting adults draw on the strengths and talents of the people within the communities, which policy-makers and providers are keen to involve. We can all recall people who have helped to expand our horizons. They may include celebrities or professionals; something heard, read or seen can also change how we see ourselves. But involving people who've been there, done it and know what it's like, can be the most inspirational of all. In the same way, local knowledge and expertise is likely to be the most credible and convincing when it comes to getting others involved.

The All Wales Learning Forum

The All Wales Learning Forum is actively ensuring the involvement of a greater range of learners no matter what their learning route. 'The problem is that most of them [the learners currently engaged in shaping their learning] are within an organisation or establishment'.

ELWa, the Welsh funding body for adult education and training, is funding five pilots to trial different systems for forming and running adult learning forums. Enthusiasm is such that the Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs), which were not selected, have elected to set up their own pilots.

The aim of the pilot projects is to bring together learners from diverse learning routes, locations and subject within an area. To discuss problems within that area and to help providers in that area break down the barriers to other learners.

The Fieldway Local Action Group (FLAG)

Croydon's Fieldway Local Action Group has recruited and trained 12 local people as Learning Promoters. The Promoters act as informal learning advocates for local people, feeding through their requirements and suggestions to local learning providers. They work in pairs planning and coordinating their own strategy. Their training includes planning, team-building, communication and presentation skills, and time management. Each Promoter has an individual learning account. This enables them to identify and meet their learning needs as they learn to define the demands of their role.

The Learning Promoters liase with local community groups, parents' groups, churches, youth groups and refugee organisations. Local bi-lingual residents have helped design leaflets to support their work. The Learning Promoters have been particularly successful in involving local men in learning, highlighting the fact that much of the practical learning that men enjoy is often unavailable. The Promoters' success in research and consultation has attracted commissions from other organisations keen to build community links but lacking the 'on-the-ground presence' and trust which the promoters have developed with the estate's communities. To date, the Learning Promoters have contacted 2008 local people, achieving a 70% increase in uptakes for learning.

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INSPIRATIONS

The Islington Handholders Project

Participants from the Islington Citizens' Conference have set up a group to take forward the conference recommendation to establish a mentoring service. 'Handholders' is a service for people who want someone to support them when they begin new learning or progress to a next course.

The group put in a bid for Adult and Community Learning Fund resources to recruit and train mentors – people who were recent new adult learners themselves. The group is piloting 'Handholders' in the Finsbury Park SRB area and has brought together 50 mentors and new learners.

NICK HAYES

4 Why it matters

Only 59% of people voted in the last General Election. This drops to 30% for European Elections and can often be under 20% for local elections. It is estimated that up to 3.5 million are missing from the electoral register. Fewer than 5% join political parties and only 1% have ever stood for public office.

People are more and more alienated from the decision-making processes that affect their lives, justifying the views of those in power that they are not capable of being involved. This mutual contempt is increasingly the keynote in democracy today. It produces public services that reflect a woeful misunderstanding of the public's real needs or, worse still, services that do not have public benefit as their main objective.

"There is nothing a politician likes so little as to be well-informed, it makes decision-making so complex and difficult."
John Maynard Keynes

"Politics isn't for the likes of us – I don't know enough about it and anyway I couldn't be bothered."
local resident

"While what matters is what works. What matters first is how we find out what works."
Carol Taylor Fitzgibbon,
Professor of Education,
University of Durham

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"Participants mentioned not only the expected barriers (costs, childcare, travel) but also the fear and humiliation that held them back from re-entering education and of repeating the same experience again. 97% of the participants thought that the public should have a say in the issues they were discussing. 90% of participants would recommend taking part in a Citizens' Conference to someone else."
Islington Citizens' Conference Report

"Learning will only happen if people want to learn. This means learning needs to be locally driven, reflecting local priorities and strengths. Many people may be wary of formal learning opportunities. But there will be other activities happening locally which will provide building blocks: for example, people may already give advice to others; meet to discuss issues of concern; or use the internet. Neighbourhood renewal provides a unique opportunity to engage and enthuse people about the benefits of learning."
DTLR Draft Guidance on Skills and Knowledge for Neighbourhood Renewal

"Learning is not something which can be given, top-down. We have moved beyond the Victorian notion that learning is something you do to people. But we have also moved beyond that welfare statist conception, that learning is something you do for people. Learning is something that you do with people, and that requires their engagement."
Towards the Learning Age: from Vision to Implementation, Bob Fryer (TSB Forum, 2000)

- Local people should be engaged in order to better inform policy development and implementation. The citizen should be seen as part of the solution, not just as part of the problem.
- An individual's knowledge may be limited, but their capacity to engage, understand and make complex common sense judgements should not be underestimated.
- Some of the most interesting and effective forms of public consultation also involve a high element of risk. The public and the media need to be convinced that that consultation is not a sign of weakness, rather the reverse.
- There must be clarity about the ground rules. What are you consulting about, what are the precise questions to which you seek answers and how will the results of consultation be translated into action?
- Consultation should be less focused on single questions addressing complex problems within a short timescale, but focused on complex questions addressing complex problems in order to achieve longer-term solutions.

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Listening to learners and public policies

The drive to consult local communities and listen to learners is underlined in a range of current policy documents, guidance and advice. Planners and service providers are being asked to evidence how local people have been involved in drawing up plans and how the plans' impact is being assessed. It is demand, not supply, that matters and evidence of impact is what counts.

The White Paper *Learning to Succeed* (1999)

Learning to Succeed gave Learning Partnerships the task of ensuring that arrangements are in place to enable feedback from learners and for potential learners to have a real influence on the quality and accessibility of learning provision.

Adult learning plans

Adult learning plans require LEAs to explain how they have carried out their needs analysis and consulted on their plans. LEAs are also asked to indicate their learner recruitment targets for under-represented groups and to describe the strategies they will use to achieve them.

Guidance on the Inspection of Adult and Community Learning

The Common Inspection Framework focuses principally on learners, learning and measuring the impact of learning. While not specific about how to consult with learners, the guidance is clear about the kinds of learning and learner involvement in learning that it values and expects. The challenge for adult and community practitioners is to translate what the guidance says about learners and learning into a practice, which uses learning to involve local people in determining local learning provision and delivery.

Local Government Act 2000

The reference in the ACL Inspection Guidance to 'improving the quality of life' reminds us that Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 gives local authorities the power to take actions that are likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of their areas' economic, social or environmental well-being. Groups of people covered by this power would include adult learners.

In exercising this power, local authorities must have regard to its Community

Strategy, which the local authority has a duty to prepare under Section 4 of the Act. The Community Strategy is the highest level plan prepared by local authorities and must be developed in consultation with other stakeholders. It must also relate to the well-being power and contribute to the achievement of national sustainable development.

Local Authority Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Local authorities are now required to measure and evaluate their performance in relation to the recently re-defined Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Framework. Local authorities are required to evidence:

- the ways in which they have gathered intelligence and consulted with their communities in setting and delivering their priorities;
- the impact this is having on improving their [the communities'] quality of life'.

The new CPA is a good example of the ways in which the Government is increasingly adopting cross-cutting planning and funding requirements and performance frameworks to drive forward its social inclusion agenda. The benefit for adult and community practitioners is the active encouragement this gives for creatively involving communities in developing plans that must demonstrate how they are impacting on communities' lives.

NICK HAYES

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6 Understanding the concepts

Community-led research

Community-led research involves training local people to carry out research within their communities on issues that affect them. The best examples are those where the people who carry out the research and agree and translate the findings into plans and actions. Community-led research is a good way of identifying local priorities in regeneration areas.

Consultation

Consultation can include a range of approaches to public involvement in policy formation and decision-making. These extend from the blank-sheet approach where people are offered an outline of ideas to which they can contribute in detail to the rubber-stamping of already fully-developed proposals. Clarity and honesty about what is being asked for and the extent to which people can contribute to, change or reject a proposal is vital when consulting. Public consultations that raise false expectations produce cynicism about the value and impact of democratic participation.

Deliberative consultation

Deliberative consultation relies on approaches, which enable participants to give informed opinions and recommendations. Such approaches are important when considering complex policy issues. Their key elements are that:

- greater amounts of time are given to considering the issues;
- participants have the opportunity to examine witnesses, call further evidence and additional witnesses and to scrutinise information;
- they are also given opportunities to deliberate with witnesses and among themselves in plenary and group sessions;
- the group will be independent of the commissioning body;
- the findings are expected to carry a weight of authority, derived from the independence and integrity of the process.

Bottom-up approaches to planning

Bottom-up planning approaches involve local people in discussions and inputs to plans that will affect and potentially benefit them. They acknowledge the

importance of involving those who will know what is relevant and what will achieve maximum impact.

Top-down approaches to planning

Top-down planning approaches are those in which policy-makers and providers produce plans that will affect others, without seeking their advice or inputs. Potentially they risk missing the point. Certainly they exclude involving those affected in achieving the plan's objectives.

Expert witness

The term 'expert witness' is used in two senses:

- The first is in the context of Citizens' Juries and Citizens Conferences where participants ask professionals who are experts in their field to present them with evidence to help them form judgements and make decisions. An example would be the involvement of an academic specialising in research in drugs' use.
- The second is used to mean the involvement of people who, because of their local knowledge and experience, are likely to have insights and expertise about issues that will contribute to decision-making. The approach acknowledges the fact that the people who experience problems are often best positioned to propose solutions to them. Those involved in the Islington Citizens' Conference were seen as expert witnesses, either because they had not participated in learning since leaving school or because they had overcome the barriers to doing so. Other expert witnesses from across the UK were invited to participate because they had pioneered innovative and successful approaches to engaging people in learning and were from similar background to the Islington participants.

7 Getting started and how to go about it

There are various ways of consulting adults. Whichever you choose, there are a number of key factors that need to be thought through first.

Why do it? What do you want to find out?

A good place to start is by looking at what you are doing already and checking whether this meets your current objectives, particularly in relation to widening participation. The following questions may help frame your thoughts:

- How are you consulting with potential learners?
- How do you know or find out what people want to learn?
- Does your learner satisfaction survey ask people whether they are satisfied with the learning they receive already? Or does it explore what they might want to learn?
- Do you talk to people who drop out of courses? Those who stay are more likely to give favourable feedback.
- Who is participating and who isn't? What does your participation, retention and progression data tell you? Have the gaps in participation been there for a long time? Who begins courses and drops out?

Your answers will only be as good as the questions you ask. It may help to situate questions about participation and learning in the contexts in which people can think more clearly about its value and daily use.

Decide who can help you formulate and answer those questions. Identify the people most affected by the issues and therefore those most likely to have the solutions.

Think about how you use the knowledge and problem-solving skills of existing learners. You are likely already to have learners on courses from the communities or backgrounds you want to involve. They will almost certainly have encountered and are tackling the barriers that may be deterring others.

- Existing learners from similar backgrounds can usually tell you a lot about the barriers to learning but are also rich sources of information about how to overcome them.
- When discussing barriers, avoid staying with top-of-the-mind issues like transport or childcare. Feelings and emotions can be powerful deterrents to learning

but can also provide powerful tools for deepening your understanding about motivation and participation.

The research or consultation brief

First, draft the objectives and desired outcomes of the research or consultation so that you are clear about what you want to find out. Use information from the following sources to inform the brief:

- national and local research;
- institutional data analysis;
- discussions with existing learners and other professionals;
- community professionals and activists;
- local knowledge.

The Islington Citizens Conference

Islington has a very high proportion of disadvantaged communities. Unemployment rates are high, especially among the black and ethnic minority communities. Many people left school with few or no qualifications and are semi-skilled or unskilled (socio-economic groups C2 to D/E). College courses were often at too high a level for people to access them.

The Lifelong Learning Service decided to use the knowledge and expertise of people from these communities to draw up its Adult Learning Plan. To assist them in developing their methodology, they employed Opinion Leader Research (OLR), the experts in public involvement and pioneers of citizens' juries. They used DfES Lifelong Learning Standards funding to pay for expert inputs and for the conference.

Using market research techniques, OLR recruited 125 participants from the relevant socio-economic groups: 50% of these had participated successfully in learning during the last two years; and 50% had not participated since leaving school. Using focus groups to further deepen their understanding of the issues and to plan the conference, the day was organised to fully investigate what motivated people from Islington's disadvantaged communities to learn and succeed against all odds and what prevented them. People were paid for their expertise (£50 per day) and told in advance that their recommendations would be implemented. The day was very successful, recording very high levels of involvement and satisfaction. Islington Council kept its promises. Conference participants were involved in implementing the recommendations.

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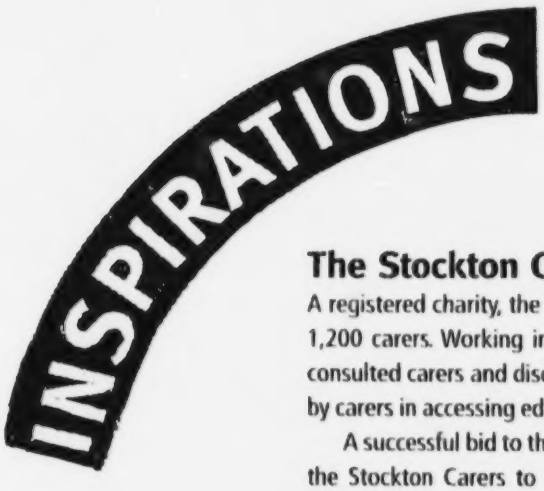
Getting the basics right

When consulting adults – whether you are involving them in research, through forums, conferences or outreach – there are some very basic principles that need to be established from the beginning.

- It is important to be clear with people from the outset the extent to which you are able to act upon their recommendations. If there are limits to what can be achieved – resources, time constraints – tell people what they are.
- People will take into account constraints stated clearly at the beginning of the consultation process. They lose faith and confidence in processes, where expectations about what will happen are raised and then disappointed.
- Be clear about how you will use the consultation outcomes. Tell people how you will update them on any actions you have taken. Some consulting adults events report to participants three months after the event or keep them updated through newsletters.
- Establish common working values and protocols at the outset. This will provide a shared ideological and social basis for the activity and inform its processes. Shared values and protocols provide guidance when differences and conflicts arise. They also help participants evaluate whether they have accomplished what they set out to achieve.
- Valuing local people's expertise must include paying for it. Effective consultation approaches regard payment as essential to securing people's wholehearted engagement and commitment.
- Participants may need training. Community-led research and outreach has to be well designed. The best research and consultation approaches involve local people in designing and delivering the activity, analysing the outcomes and putting them into effect. Bad examples are those in which local people carry out the activity and others interpret and implement the outcomes.
- Training enables people to understand what is possible and how to go about it. It can also give them confidence and authority. There are an increasing number of training courses and qualifications that can be used to support community consultation. Open college units can be picked and mixed to match what people want to learn.



The Stockton Carers

A registered charity, the Stockton Borough Resources Centre supports over 1,200 carers. Working in partnership with Stockton Adult Education, they consulted carers and discovered that, in addition to the many barriers faced by carers in accessing education, there was a real enthusiasm to participate.

A successful bid to the Adult and Community Learning Fund has enabled the Stockton Carers to set up a Carers Steering Committee drawn from different carers' groups who met to plan and develop learning. In working with new learners, the carers emphasise the importance of information, good communication and honesty about what can be achieved. Consulting should not take place, they believe, unless it will influence what happens. Clear terms of reference and agreement about boundaries and limits are important. More than one method of involving people should be used and everyone who has an interest needs to be represented. Equal status for all participants is essential. Involving a range of learners to represent others is important; too often the same people are used and become over-burdened, and this in itself has its own limitations.

People need to be informed and learn how to become involved, through training if necessary, and information should be clear and free from jargon. All views and contributions should be respected, the costs of involvement met and feedback given on the consultation results. Review and monitoring need to be built-in from the outset. Above all, learners want to be able to communicate on an equal basis with someone who listens and will respond. Developing mutual trust and respect is essential.

The staff at Stockton Borough Carers Resource Centre work closely with learners to develop the personal qualities they need to learn successfully. These include patience, perseverance, listening, honesty, self-esteem and assertiveness. Learners are linked to carer mentors if they need one and a free sitting service and transport are provided to enable carers to attend courses.

The Bolton Information Network

Local people in Bolton are accredited Learning Ambassadors and take the lead on community research. The Ambassadors have produced a Directory of Community Groups and Community Premises and act as mentors for new ambassadors. The Bolton Network works closely with its local Learning Partnership, who have adopted the Ambassadors' community research approach for use by young people.

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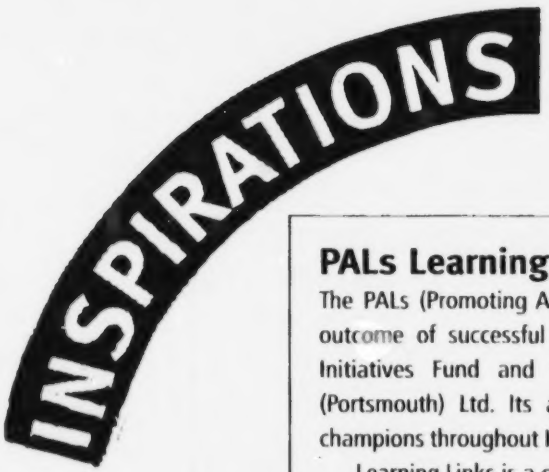
Working in partnership

Firstly, decide who you want to involve. Secondly, identify who will contribute what and when and how these contributions will be integrated. Thirdly, decide how you will ensure that the outcomes achieve impact.

- If values, purposes, roles, responsibilities and outcomes are clear and agreed from the outset and partners can see the value which is added by their involvement, then partnerships are more likely to work.
- Although it is important to achieve senior management and local political support for the activity and its outcomes, the involvement of politicians and senior managers in the detailed planning or delivery of the activity may inhibit other professionals and local people from contributing.
- The power relationships in consultation partnerships are complex and require careful thought. Local people will have less power and access to resources than professional partners.
- Effective partnerships bring together people who share common or related objectives, including people who, on their own, may not have the power to achieve them. This ensures that resources, both intellectual and material, are shared and there is mutual investment in achieving shared outcomes.
- Partnerships, which are made up of people who ought to be there, normally will not achieve as much. Partnerships of the key movers and shakers, with the sponsorship of those who have the power and resources to progress matters, are more likely to achieve success.
- Not all partners need to be involved all of the time, only when and how their contribution is appropriate, for example, the involvement of research and statistics officers at the planning stage.



PALs Learning Champions

The PALs (Promoting Adult Learning) Learning Champions project is the outcome of successful bids to the Learning and Skills Council's Local Initiatives Fund and the European Social Fund by Learning Links (Portsmouth) Ltd. Its aim is to support the development of learning champions throughout Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Learning Links is a community-focused organisation promoting lifelong learning. Their primary aim is to provide learning opportunities to enable people to play a full role in neighbourhood economic and social renewal. Like many successful projects, the PALs project developed from lessons learned from an initial pilot.

The role of the PALs is to support and encourage community consultation and local networking to widen the participation in learning of under-represented groups and to work in partnership with community and voluntary organisations, colleges and other agencies to make this happen. Each area has an Area Co-ordinator who publicises the project, recruits and supports the volunteers, organises accredited training and liaises between the volunteers and organisations, which want their services.

The PALs learn about existing learning opportunities and the barriers people may face in accessing them. They are encouraged to make contact with people in a variety of locations such as pubs, shops and school gates to identify and find ways of responding to learning needs identified in their own communities, to tell people where they can obtain information, advice and guidance and to help at events. They will accompany people who are nervous about attending a course for the first time.

PALs are encouraged to take further courses for their own self-development. Volunteers contribute as much or as little time as they have available. The project is close to achieving its target recruitment of 450 PALS and hopes to attract 13,000 new learners.

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INSPIRATIONS

The WEA/UNISON Partnership

The Workers' Educational Association is the UK's largest provider of adult education and training, with over 100,00 part time learners annually. From its foundation in 1903 to the present, the WEA has supported student participation in determining the curriculum, and in its democratic structures and governance.

In partnership with UNISON, the public sector union, the WEA has developed its *Return to Learn* programme. Where employees participate in their workplace, they benefit from paid educational leave, whether union members or not. Since the original RTL, now in its ninth version, the programme has expanded to include a full range of Open College Network accredited courses, from Skills for Life through to access to HE. Learner and employer feedback are at the heart of these developments, now carrying the overall title of *Learning @ Work*. A new partnership with NHS, which uses NHS Learning Accounts, is enabling support staff to participate in *Learning @ Work* courses on a paid release basis.

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10 The use of experts

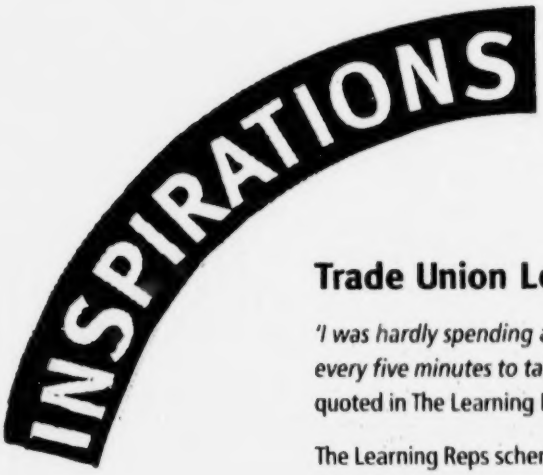
It is always tempting to parachute in consultants to undertake complex, challenging work. The shortcomings are that consultants do not always possess the local knowledge and drive of local communities. Nor will consultants share the commitment of local people to achieving the consultation outcomes. If external agencies are used, then strategies need to be in place to embed their expertise locally.

The same can be true of higher education and research bodies. Higher education institutions are useful partners for helping providers and their local communities access relevant consultation and research documents and for training them on research methods. However, it is important that community consultation training and methods are also community-led and developed locally, taking account of what is happening on the ground.

One of the benefits of community-led consultation is that those who do the work do not disappear at the end of the contract but are there to make it happen.

Find out which organisations locally and nationally are engaged in consulting adults.

- There are excellent national bodies with expertise in this field. NIACE is one; Opinion Leader Research, the experts in citizens' juries and panels is another. Invite someone along to join your planning group for an initial briefing, so that you can discuss your ideas.
- If you have funding, it may be worth 'buying in expertise', especially if you want advice on how to experiment or develop different structures and practices. Alternatively consult the websites and documentation listed at the end of this document.
- Do not restrict your research only to research and consultation on adult and community learning. Interest in consulting adults is gaining popularity with business, the public and the voluntary sectors. Concerns about decreasing levels of democratic participation are also stimulating interest in developing new methods of public involvement and of engaging communities in decision making.
- The IPPR Award for Public Involvement website is a good source of information about innovations in consulting adults.



Trade Union Learning Reps

'I was hardly spending any time on the job because people would stop me every five minutes to talk about learning'
quoted in The Learning Rep Winter 2002

The Learning Reps scheme was set up by the TUC (Trades Union Congress) in the mid 1990s. Reps can now be found across the UK, acting for a range of trade unions, including USDAW, UNISON, PCS, GMB and in a variety of workplaces, including supermarkets, hospitals, factories. The reps role is to encourage employee participation in learning, to situate learning on the workplace agenda, to partner with employers on their workforce development and training needs and to agree time off for learning. More recently reps have taken on a lead role in workplace basic skills. Employees with basic skills' requirements are more likely to approach their trade union rep.

Learning reps are trained in giving information, advice and guidance; analysing learning or training needs, advising on basic skills, working with employers and on Investors in People. Recently accorded legal recognition, their new rights give them reasonable time to carry out their work and for training. The new rights also provide for unpaid time off for employees to have access to their services.

Sure Start

Sure Start is a major government programme aiming to close the gap in outcomes between children living in poverty and the wider child population.

Each programme is designed to build on existing services for children aged 0-4 years and their families, and to augment these with new services appropriate to the local community. A key principle of Sure Start is the involvement of parents in designing and delivering services. All services are expected to contribute to achieving Sure Start's four key objectives:

- improving health;
- improving ability to learn;
- improving social and emotional development; and
- strengthening families and communities.

Sure Start was set up initially with £450 million to deliver 250 local programmes by 2002. Each programme runs in a geographically defined area of need, and includes an under-fours population of between 400 and 800. Once areas are selected, Sure Start services are for all families in the area. In the Year 2000 Spending Review, Sure Start was enlarged, with a new target of 500 local programmes.

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INSPIRATIONS

The Copenhagen Surestart Research Programme

Copenhagen Surestart brought in experts to train local parents in community research. The researchers' task was to find out what people wanted from their Surestart Programme. As local parents, the researchers were known in the area and familiar with local issues. Therefore they were able to form more equal relationships with people and to secure their trust. As a result, people were more willing to share their ideas and concerns. Once the initial research was completed, the parents were available to let people know what was happening next. The Surestart parents are leading on implementing the research. They have undertaken further training themselves and are now setting up the courses people asked for.

Enterprise Careers Peer Research Project

Enterprise Careers wanted to explore the service's image with young people, those who used the service and those who did not. To do this, they employed peer researchers, four local young women who had developed research skills through participating in the Youth Empowerment Strategy (YES) research course and by trying out their skills on a week-long research project on estates in Hackney, East London. The approach was adopted in order to elicit more honest and accurate responses from the young people being interviewed.

The research was conducted using structured interviews. The peer researchers contributed to developing the questions. Users were mostly interviewed at the Careers Centre. Non-users were interviewed 'on their own turf' in the streets and through youth clubs, schools, colleges and other places to which young people go.

The research outcomes have provided valuable insights on how the service needs to be improved. The peer research technique was very fruitful, generating responses from young people which otherwise might have been suppressed in interviews with adults.

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11 The design and planning stage

Taking time at the outset to explore and define what you want to achieve and who needs to be involved is critical. This is the stage at which to ensure that those who can make things happen are on board. Likely to take a back seat during the research and consultation stage, they will resume a more active role when the research or consultation outcomes are implemented.

At the design and planning stage you will need to think about:

- Whom you want to consult and why. Do you want to involve a wide range of people or specially targeted groups?
- The buy-in of policy-makers and education providers to the consultation method and outcomes. These will include senior managers, decision-makers and resource-holders from organisations critical to the delivery of your current and future plans.
- Support from local authority councillors and officers – these may include ward councillors, chairs of relevant committees or executive members.
- The use of expert inputs – organisations with experience of consulting adults or a track record in pioneering community-led consultation models. These can provide useful connections and contacts, advice on effective approaches and models.
- Local voluntary sector and community groups. Although it may be useful to involve local umbrella group voluntary and community sector organisations at the initial planning stage.
- Sixth-form colleges, colleges of further education and universities. Providers of post-16 education, who can contribute research and data inputs, professional and other resources and importantly provide progression from adult- and community-based learning to further and higher education and employment.
- Employers and local business people. Providers of employment and local economic activity.

Make sure you involve and invite feedback from those you want to consult even at the design and planning stage. Focus groups can be a good way of checking out what people think the issues are and what they mean.

12 The research and consultation stage

The research and consultation stage should involve those affected by the issues and those who can help problem solve. People affected by the issues often make the best problem-solvers. More motivated to seek solutions because they care about their communities and their issues, they are also more likely to make the solutions work.

- In widening participation work, learners from similar backgrounds to those of the people you want to attract usually make powerful learning advocates.

Bristol Community Education Service Community Research and Consultation

The project's aim was to develop a model of research that would provide an empowering approach to local decision making and project planning in areas where people were marginalised or excluded from taking part. The model was designed to ensure that the questions asked, the information analysed and the final reports and presentations were determined by the community for the community.

Local people were recruited, trained and employed to carry out research and consultation. They were supported to analyse and present their findings. These findings were used to inform future projects and local service development and delivery. Local consultants were supported to sustain their involvement in local decision making. Bristol's 'bottom-up' approach to consultation and planning is a key element in the partnership between the Community Education Service and Bristol Regeneration Partnership.

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- Market research methods are worth exploring to ensure people not represented by existing groups are involved. The electoral register, advertisements in local newspapers or approaching people where they congregate such as shopping centres or football grounds for example, are all good ways of making contact.
- Invite people to participate from other areas who have developed solutions to problems similar to those you are grappling with.
- People from disadvantaged communities share huge challenges in common yet rarely have opportunities to share experiences. Networks can help galvanise collective knowledge and understandings, strategies and solutions. They can also create strong and lasting relationships.
- Ensure that the research or consultation findings are acknowledged formally by those who have the power to put them into effect. Presentations by participants to governing bodies, local authority or other decision-making bodies are a good way of doing this. At consultation events the involvement of decision-makers at the final plenary session is a good way of ensuring that people's contributions are heard and will be acted upon.

NICK HAYES

13 Resources and costs

Consultation obviously involves costs. The best approach is to build funding for consultation into your annual or project budget. Adult and Community Learning (ACL) funding can be used to resource training in consultation and community consultation events. The biggest investment is often needed at the beginning, when you may want to buy in experts to assist you work through your ideas. In discussions about costs it is worth bearing in mind the costs of not providing what learners want to learn. These will include opportunity costs to local communities, as well as funding lost because of poor recruitment and retention. In seeking funding for consulting adults, consider approaching bodies, which share your objectives in widening participation, for example, the local Learning and Skills Council, the local Learning Partnership, regeneration partnerships.

- If engaging public involvement experts, ensure that their expertise is passed on to local practitioners, especially people working in neighbourhood learning and community settings.
- It is important to put the new learning into practice and more efficient to maintain a light touch relationship with experts once the initial learning has been assimilated. This can be a role in evaluating on-going work or generating new activities.
- The Adult and Community Learning Fund and the Learning and Skills Council Local Initiatives Fund are both good sources of funding for innovative development work.

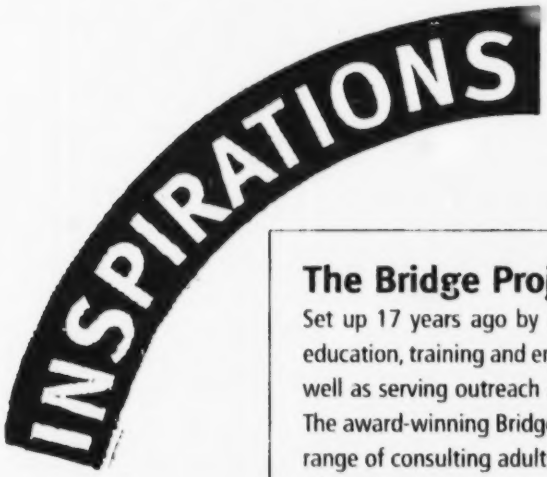
Making participants welcome

Ensure your planning includes the costs of decent venues, childcare and good food. Environments and food that value the participants and the activity encourage people to engage more fully.

14 Building in sustainability

If not a normal part of the planning cycle, consultation can appear tokenistic. Too much or too little consultation can result in consultation fatigue.

Developing and sustaining new consultation approaches can be challenging, especially if the aim is to involve new participants. Varying consultation approaches can help. Conferences work best when setting three- to five-year strategic aims and



The Bridge Project

Set up 17 years ago by a small group of local women to access women into education, training and employment, the Bridge Project today has four centres, as well as serving outreach centres in Sunderland, Washington and North Durham. The award-winning Bridge Project sustains its grass roots commitment through a range of consulting adults approaches that are built into every stage and aspect of learning.

Local adults plan the curriculum through participation in access to learning events, open, taster and focus days. All courses have a structured programme of learning but are designed to include participants' own learning choices. Informal reviews and end-of-course evaluations are used to improve and develop course content, teaching and learning and resource uses. There are Learners Forums at which existing learners present their views and contribute to strategic planning, quality and development. Use of informal groups is made in order to capture wider, more 'bottom-up' perspectives on the project's work. Volunteer forums, well-advertised 'have your say' and suggestion boxes encourage adults to regard participation as part of the normal business of the project. Learners are actively involved in the promotion of learning locally and in publicity. Learners are encouraged to take part in the Bridge Management Committee and Board of Directors, where with training and support they can be involved in policy making and take on the project's employer responsibilities. 95% of the Board are or have been Bridge Project learners.

The Community Engagement Toolkit

As a follow-on from the Citizens' Conference, Islington is developing new approaches to planning that can be applied at local level as well as borough level. The borough has 21 new neighbourhood learning centres which all have individual identities but share aspirations in common to pursue growth within their communities. The Lifelong Learning Service of the Council is keen to harness the enthusiasm of staff and volunteers from the centres in maximising the contribution of their constituent communities to bottom-up planning. This is seen as key to facilitating learning within these centres and to establishing a model for their development.

The Lifelong Learning Service recognises that each centre needs to be enabled to develop its own methods for community engagement that take into account the specific needs of each area and community. In partnership with Opinion Leader Research they are drawing up a Community Engagement Toolkit.

The work will be done in three stages. The first involves workshops with centres to understand their needs for engagement with their communities, to review and evaluate what they already do, to hear evidence about other methods they might use, to brainstorm about the future and to develop a wish-list for the toolkit. The second stage involves development of the Community Engagement Toolkit. The toolkit will be sufficiently flexible to allow each centre to adapt it to fit its particular needs and those of its community. It is likely to include:

- briefing notes
- case histories
- questionnaires
- scenario based suggestions/methods for community engagement.
- helpline

Assistance with tailoring and managing the toolkit will be given to centres where needed. The planning outcomes will be fed into a borough-wide planning day, which will bring the centres together with providers, including the local college. Additional research, data and evidence will be considered and the outcomes will be used to draft Islington's Adult Learning Plan. A follow-up Community Conference will be held in order in the future in order that the centres can share their models and refine them further.

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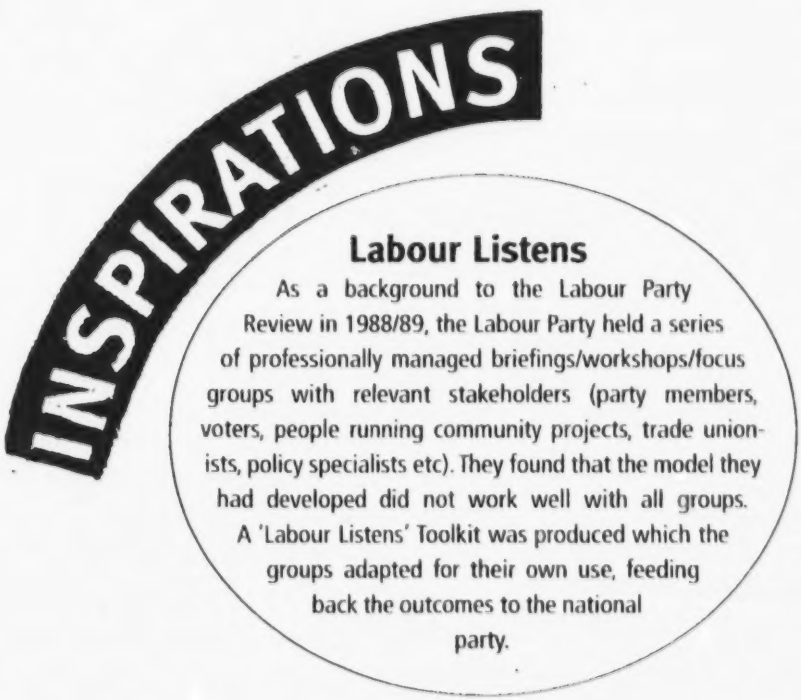
objectives. Work in specific geographic communities, which is then fed into area plans, is better carried out annually. This is so a match can be achieved between strategy and local priorities.

Process is important. If the consultation process works, then on-going discussions about learning and other local issues are more likely to be sustained. The Norfolk Learning Partnership's project 'Hearing the Learners' Voice' has focused on developing good consultation feedback processes.

One-size consultation methods will not suit all. A range of consultation approaches from which communities can choose, encourages communities to adopt approaches that match their role, size and character. A well-planned and evaluated pilot of new consultation approaches can be the catalyst for more wide-reaching change.

If we believe that consultation works best when it is community led, we need to accept the creativity, risk-taking and resourcefulness that comes with it. Good adult and community learning and regeneration work is always about negotiating the relationship between control and risk, interference and accountability, widening participation and quality.


INSPIRATIONS
Labour Listens
As a background to the Labour Party Review in 1988/89, the Labour Party held a series of professionally managed briefings/workshops/focus groups with relevant stakeholders (party members, voters, people running community projects, trade unionists, policy specialists etc). They found that the model they had developed did not work well with all groups. A 'Labour Listens' Toolkit was produced which the groups adapted for their own use, feeding back the outcomes to the national party.

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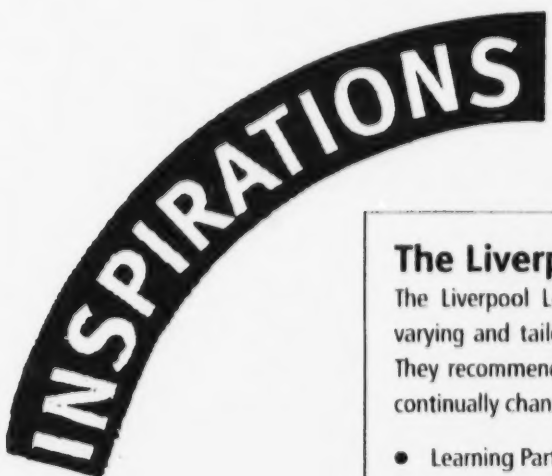
15 Postscript

Community-led research and consultation can be very rewarding. It is important that what is learned is put into effect. Evaluation might include:

- reviewing the composition of the current workforce against the community profile;
- creating opportunities for people to translate their community commitment into new professional roles;
- using consulting adult approaches to evolve new professional communities and practices;
- thinking about how to evaluate relationships between professionals and communities;
- ensuring learning outcomes are reflected in organisational plans, quality systems and resource allocations.



The Liverpool Learning Partnership

The Liverpool Learning Partnership highlights the importance of varying and tailoring consultation approaches to different groups. They recommend that consultation should be on-going to capture continually changing needs. They also recommend that:

- Learning Partnership's should clearly communicate their ethos;
- Consultations should be in partnership with local community based projects;
- Participants should be informed about the consultation's aims and that the findings and resulting changes should be communicated to all.

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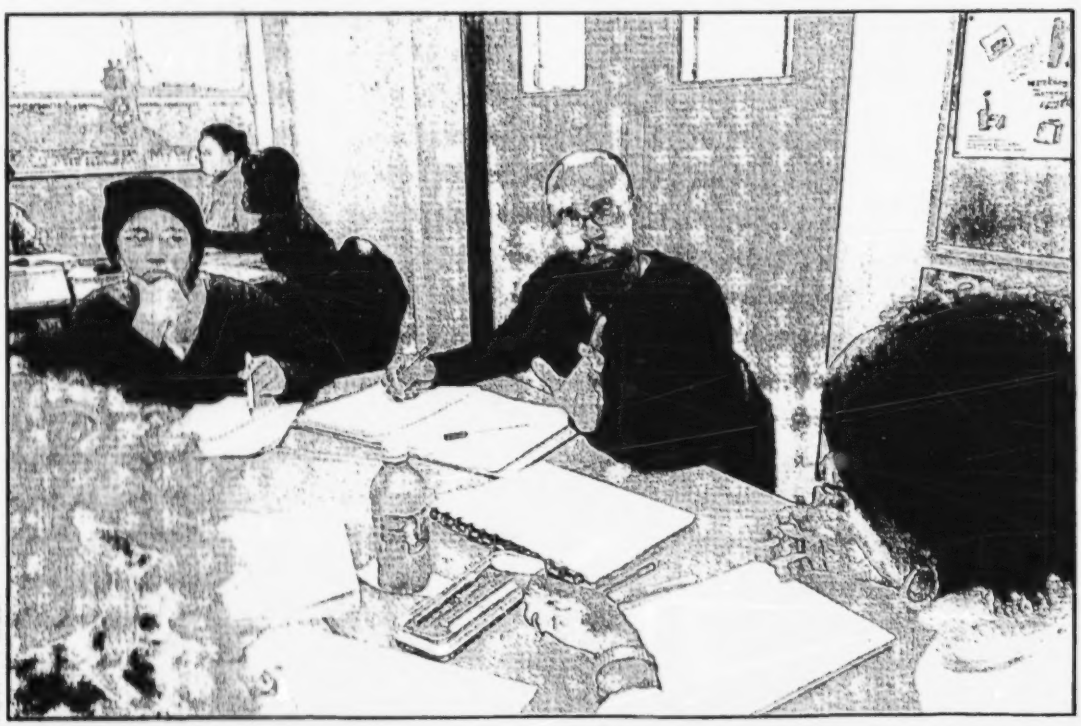
16 Check it out

This checklist reminds us what to think about when consulting adults:

- Be ambitious and willing to take risks – most traditional consultation methods have failed to attract new adult learners.
- Identify what you want to know: the questions you want to ask and the outcomes you want to achieve.
- Decide from the outset the extent to which you can commit to the consultation outcomes. If there are boundaries and limits, name them.
- How much funding do you have? Can you use ACL funding?
- Who needs to be involved? Do different people need to be involved at different times for different purposes?
- How will you involve people who are not contacted easily or part of existing groups. This will be important if your aim is to widen participation.
- Do those leading the research or consultation need training?
- Ensure you secure the 'buy-in' of decision-makers. It is often worth involving those engaged in the consultation – the adults consulting – to formally present their findings and recommendations to a panel of decision-makers.
- Involve organisations with the kind of expertise you want to develop.
- Seek good practice examples from other local communities. Network knowledge, learning and experience.
- Decide how much to pay people for their involvement.
- Choose environments to work in that show that you value the participants and their contributions.
- Ensure the food is good and a crèche is available.
- Take photographs and video the event so others can share it.
- Ensure that participants are welcomed, valued, heard and are clear about how their contributions will be used.
- People will produce practical and intelligent solutions to complex issues if they are given opportunities to engage seriously with them. Always treat adults as the knowledgeable and intelligent people they are, especially where their experience is concerned.
- Engage: listen, open up, challenge, encourage expression of feeling and share yours. Be willing to engage with complex and difficult issues. This is how trust develops.

- Evaluate, review and apply what you have learned.
- Keep participants updated on actions taken since the event.



ADRIAN PROBERT

Glossary

Accredited – Accredited learning is learning which is recognised through a qualification and therefore has currency. Accredited learning enables people to progress to different levels of learning and to employment. Learning providers and employers often specify the qualifications they want.

Active citizenship – The practice of being directly and actively involved in government, national or local politics or matters affecting the welfare of others and society as a whole. To be a good citizen can include being a caring neighbour, a volunteer, someone who reports crime.

Activism – Refers to groups or communities who commit to take direct action together in relation to a social or political issue eg to campaign for better education, to challenge the siting of a motorway.

Adult and community learning practitioners – The professionals who work with adults either in educational settings – adult education institutes, further education colleges, university adult education, schools – or in community settings – community and health centres, clubs, sports venues. The term can include teachers, outreach workers, learning facilitators.

Bottom up – In this document bottom-up is used to refer to research, policies and plans, which originate with the people whom they involve. The approach is based on the belief that plans etc are more likely to achieve impact, when they are developed, owned and supported by the people they affect.

Citizens Panels – These are panels of people who are usually representative of the population as a whole or are specially chosen to deliberate on complex social issues. Panels hear expert evidence and can call witnesses in order to form their views. Citizens Panels demonstrate how people with little formal knowledge of an issue, can handle complex evidence and reach complex conclusions, when given opportunities to question experts, form judgements and make recommendations.

Collectivism – The principle and practice of people acting together for the benefit of all.

Commissioning Body – The organisation or group that initiates the consultation.

Common Inspection Framework – The national inspection framework for 16-19 work-based learning and for all learning that takes place after the age of 19, except in higher education.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment Framework – An inspection framework developed by the Audit Commission, which assesses the service performance of local authorities. A comprehensive framework it assess the impact of individual services and of service provision as a whole.

Conferences – Conferences are meetings of large groups people who come together to hear expert speakers and to take part in groups, in which they are involved in discussions about aspects of the conference theme or subject matter. Conferences may make recommendations or conclude by agreeing key points for future action.

Democratic participation – Refers to people's involvement in the government of society either directly or through their elected representative. Democratic participation can range from becoming or voting for members of parliament or local councillors to becoming a school governor, management committee member, campaigner, taking part in a demonstration or writing to an elected representative or newpaper.

Dialogue – An exchange of ideas, opinions etc between two or more people that can lead to some form of conclusion or decision. Different cultures have different ways of doing this, ranging from dialogues where the majority view informs the decision through to those which require everyone's agreement.

Disaffected – Term used to refer to people – and most often young people – who are 'turned off' or alienated from learning and the wider society. The shortcoming of the term is that it can cast the person or group as the problem rather than society.

Focus Groups – Focus groups have become an important tool of policy makers and business, who use focus groups to test out public opinion on a range of issues eg on drugs policy or to seek solutions eg how to engage people in learning or to give feedback about a planned new product eg . enhanced mobile phones.

Formal learning – Most often used to refer to learning that is accredited through a qualification. The terms formal and informal learning can mean different things to different people. For a good discussion of the terms and some helpful definitions see Veronica McGivney's Informal Learning in the Community: a trigger for change and development.

Forums – Meetings, which bring together people, who represent others or have relevant expertise, to discuss or make decisions about issues they have in common. In an adult and community learning, context these issues might include fees policies, feedback on existing or proposed courses. Although effective, forums can seem very formal to people unused to committee-type meetings. Being representative, they can also exclude people. It is worth thinking of a range of ways in which to engage adults in discussions about matters which affect them and on which they have views.

Ideological – A set of shared ideas, beliefs and approaches.

Learning champions – People who act as champions of or advocates for learning. Usually people who themselves have successfully undertaken learning recently, often overcoming emotional and other barriers in order to do so, learning champions are often better positioned and are more convincing to their peers than professionals.

Learner evaluations – It is good practice to find out about learners' experience of their learning, what has been of value and how they think the learning could be improved. The learners' feedback is usually incorporated into the course review and the overall recommendations for improving the course are then included in the course/departmental action plan. The new Common Inspection Framework focuses on learners, learning and the impact of learning. Adult and community learning inspectors will consult learners' evaluations of courses.

Learning partnerships – Local partnerships of learning providers and stakeholders set up shortly before the Learning and Skills Act 2000 to bring synergy into education area planning. Many continue to play an active role in consulting or 'listening to' learners.

Mentors – People who are trained to support and encourage others to achieve their goals. Mentors usually share characteristics and experiences in common with those they mentor. This gives them the knowledge, understanding and empathy they need to act effectively.

Mutual Improvement Societies – Groups who came together for the express purpose of learning and of individual and common advancement and betterment. Setting their own agendas, programmes of learning and methods of study, such groups had a passionate belief that learning could assist them understand and transform their social and economic situations. Self-taught learners – autodidacts – often experts in their own area of knowledge, were but one expression of the belief

that learning can be both self-fulfilling but also socially and economically transforming.

Need analysis – A bringing together of evidence – formal and informal – to identify what people's needs are in order that solutions and remedies can be sought. A needs analysis can involve looking a data or less formally, engaging those affected by the issues in discussion.

Neighbourhood Renewal – Government regeneration programme that emphases more the in portance of community leadership and participation in the development and delivery of plans to renew poor and disadvantaged communities. The concept of neighbourhood renewal grew out of the failure of past regeneration programmes to fully involve local people. It draws on the excellent Policy Action Team (PAT) Reports produced by the Government's Social Exclusion Unit.

Non-participants – Term frequently used to refer to people who do not participate in formal learning after leaving school. The term can be used negatively and imply criticism or blame.

Outreach – Professionals have often found it more effective to meet adults in the places where they feel confident and self-assured eg the local community centre, the health centre, in their own homes. This is referred to as 'outreach'. Some adult services employ 'outreach workers'.

Participative – Refers to activities, which encourage and achieve people's involvement.

Protocols – The rules and behaviours agreed by a group to enable it to work productively and effectively

Public consultation – A process by which people are asked their views, opinions etc about an issue. Most often a meeting which anyone can attend – people can also respond in writing, by e-mail or telephone.

Questionnaires – Documents setting out questions on issues that invite written replies from a range of people or particular groups. The replies can be used to develop policies, improve services etc.

Regeneration – Successive government have developed schemes, which aim to radically and comprehensively address the challenges and issues faced by people in poor areas eg large scale unemployment, low education attainment, poor housing and health. Early schemes were often criticised for being top-down and for focusing

on housing and environmental problems rather than on people-led regeneration.

Researchers – Usually people whose professional role is to explore or analyse an issue of importance and interest to others eg the Government, professional bodies, private, public and voluntary sector organisations. Research outcomes may be used to develop policy, may challenge or change existing knowledge and practice or guide future action.

In this document researchers are taken to include adults who have knowledge and expertise of value to policy makers and service providers or who can provide it through research. The adults are usually trained in research techniques in order to carry out this task.

Social and Economic – The consideration of the social and economic factors of a situation. For example, the mutual improvement societies believed that learning would improve their social as well as their economic existence.

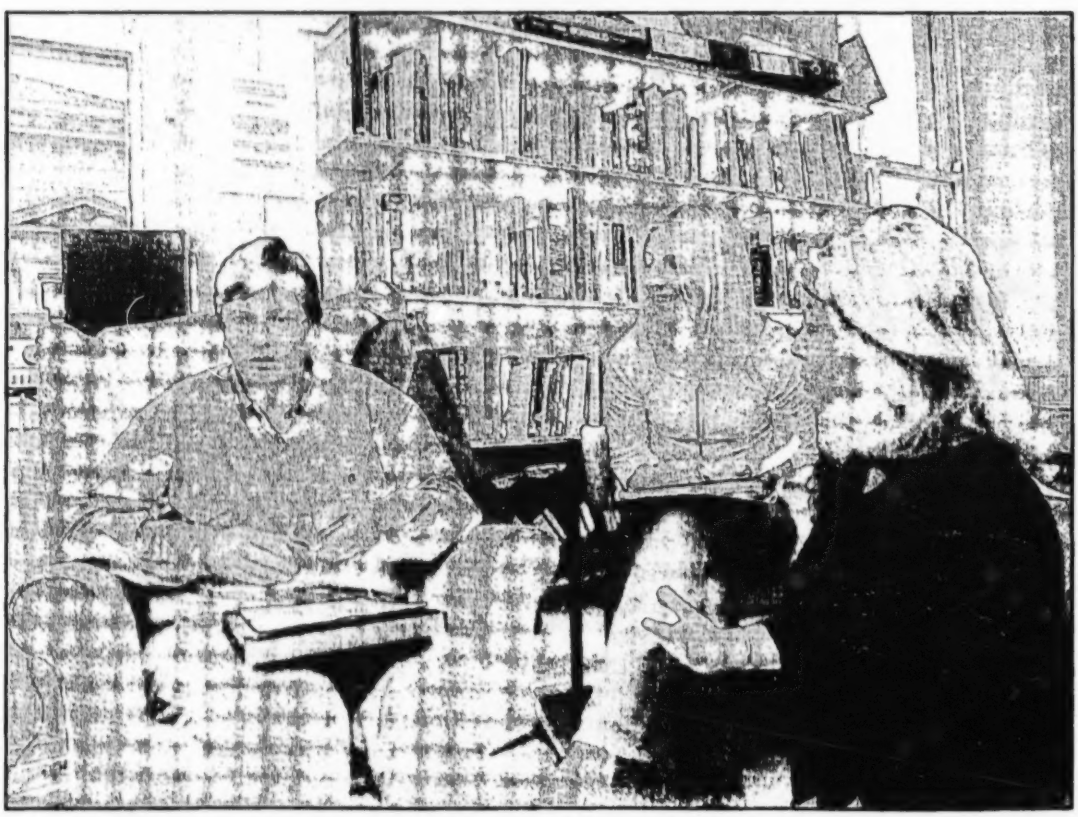
Social exclusion – A term used to describe an individual's or group's alienation from society. In common with disaffected, non-participant – it can mask or obscure the political, socio-economic or cultural factors that create and sustain alienation.

Supply side – The supply side of learning refers to the people and organisations who plan and provide learning. They include education policy makers, providers – universities, further education colleges, the voluntary sector, employers, adult and community learning providers, schools. Only school learning is compulsory. Where learning is voluntary, it is essential to give thought to the 'demand side' – what motivates people to learn and their choice of learning..

Surestart – A cross-sector and agency initiative involving health, education and social services and parents in providing more integrated, 'joined-up' services for children 0-4, their parents and families. Targetted at poor areas, Surestart is one of a range of government policy initiatives that was developed from cross-departmental reviews of services for children and young people. The reviews found that numbers of government departments and special units were responsible for different aspects of service but there were often inadequate links between them. Surestart seeks to redress this.

Tokenism – The practice of doing the minimum or as much as is required to comply. In this document it is used to refer to arrangements where, for example, learner involvement is secured through having a representative on a committee but where little thought or effort is given to the purpose or benefits of learner participation in decision-making.

Welfare statist conception – The concept that the state should provide for the welfare of those who for reasons of sickness, poverty, age, incapability cannot provide for themselves and that as a society we should contribute individually to the overall welfare and benefit of all. Here it is used in its negative sense to mean the state acting for people rather than empowering or enabling them to act for themselves.



NICK HAYES

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Further reading and resources

Reading

Learning Lessons, Policy Action Team Report 16, March 2000.

Attracting New Learners, International Evidence and Practice, 2002, Sue Taylor and Helen Cameron, Learning and Skills Development Agency

The Social Life of Information, 2000, John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, Harvard Business School Press

Learning Works, 1999, Helena Kennedy, Further Education Funding Council

Inclusive Learning, 1996, Professor John Tomlinson, Further Education Funding Council

Reclaiming Common Purpose, 2000, Jane Thompson, NIACE

'Learning, Continuity and Change in Adult Life' by Tom Schuller, Angela Brassett-Grundy, Andy Green, Cathie Hammond and John Preston in *Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report* 3

'Learning, Family Formation and Dissolution' by Louisa Blackwell and John Bynner in *Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report* 4

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Useful websites

NIACE – www.niace.org.uk
Neighbourhood Renewal Unit – www.neighbourhood.gov.uk
Social Exclusion Unit – www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk
New Economics Foundation - www.neweconomics.org
Opinion Leader Research – www.opinionleader.co.uk
TUC Learning Services – www.learning services.org.uk
Workers Educational Association – www.wea.org.uk
IPPR and Guardian Public Involvement Awards – www.ippr.org/public involve
Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning – www.learningbenefits.net

Lifelines 5

Consulting adults

Chris Jude

The knowledge and expertise of communities in motivating and engaging others in learning – often using personal and practical examples of overcoming earlier negative learning experiences – demonstrate how traditional community-led approaches continue to achieve impact in adult and community learning today.

This inspiring guide shows the many innovative and imaginative ways that adult and community learning practitioners are engaging with their communities in planning, providing and evaluating learning. It sets out the reasons and rationale for consultation and offers a step-by-step approach to developing models that match local priorities and needs. This guide offers inspirations and examples of communities playing a crucial role, both in increasing demand and in shaping policy about local provision for adults.

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